

New Year and Still on Course— Developing Goals for the Year 2000

As medical science has learned more about the prevention of disease and disability, it has become abundantly clear that people can influence their states of health for the better by avoiding behaviors and lifestyles that put them at risk and by embracing habits and practices that enhance their well-being.

It was with this simple truth in mind that the Public Health Service (PHS) in 1979 generated the 1990 health objectives for the nation. There were 226 objectives; we called them our “1990 health objectives” because we hoped to accomplish them over a 10-year period—by 1990.

With 1 year still to go, we have a pretty good idea of how well we'll do. We are seeing solid declines in infant and childhood mortality, by 24 and 23 percent respectively. Mortality rates are down for adolescents and adults, as well. We have made great progress in reducing deaths from heart disease and stroke and in expanding public knowledge about the dangers of smoking.

We have made little or no progress, on the other hand, in meeting our family planning objectives. A shortfall of a different kind has been our inability in some cases even to measure progress or the lack of it. A case in point is toxic agent control: we just do not have the data we need to determine how effective we have been.

But these are only a few examples out of more than 200 objectives and, overall, we can be proud of our successes. In 1985, a mid-course review showed that we already had met 13 percent of our objectives and that another 35 percent were on track to be accomplished by 1990.

I hope that 1990 will see us reaching more than 48 percent of our objectives. In the meantime, I prefer to view our glass as half full, rather than half empty, and I am confident that in the second stage of this long-term prevention effort—the Year 2000 Project—we will accomplish those objectives as yet unmet and a great deal more besides.

Indeed, we are well into the process of developing new national goals and objectives for the

decade coming up. During 1988, the Public Health Service, in cooperation with the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, held seven hearings in cities across the country. These hearings gave a wide range of State and local officials, interested citizens, and health professionals and their organizations an opportunity to influence the structure and content of the Year 2000 objectives. In all, more than 760 persons and groups submitted testimony.

The Institute of Medicine has put this testimony into a computerized data base that is being used by Public Health Service agencies as they draw up their first drafts of the objectives. Each agency is responsible for drafting the objectives in its area of expertise, and each has assembled expert work groups consisting of representatives of the PHS, other Federal agencies, and non-Federal health professionals. When the drafts are finished, early this year, the work groups will submit them to non-Federal panels of experts for critique. They will then undergo further internal scrutiny before they are published this coming summer for critical review and comment. We anticipate publication of the final document in mid-1990.

More than 250 national organizations are participating in the objectives development and review process. If a national professional organization of which you are a member is interested in participating and is not already part of our Year 2000 Health Objectives Consortium, I urge you to contact us and ask to be included. You may call or write to Lynn Artz, MD, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2132 Switzer Building, 330 C. St., SW, Washington, DC 20201. Call (202) 472-5370.

The Year 2000 Project, building on lessons learned and experiences gained in our pursuit of the 1990 health objectives, is producing a national infrastructure of professionals dedicated to preventing unnecessary disease and disability. We are on course still, and working together, to bring the full benefits of disease prevention and health promotion to all our people.

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